1: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1942
FF52 Nupe FF52

In the houses of the higher as well as of lesser nobility I found the practice of divorcing ageing wives and replacing them with more attractive girls. The ex-wife, especially if she had borne children, would be allowed to stay on in the house and would continue to be supported by the husband, or ex-husband—a wife on pension, as it were. The late *Etsu* of Agaie was partial to a different method: he used to marry off his 'pensioned' wives, at very low bride-price, to *talakaži* and peasants, who were either glad to find a 'cheap' wife or else afraid to refuse so exalted a gift. Among the upper classes of Bida old men, long past marrying age, would still add young girls to the number of their 'wives'. Aphrodisiacs (which one can buy from the barber-doctors in Bida) and stimulants (above all, kola-nuts) keep alive their sexual appetite. Old S., who died in 1935, 70 years old, had married a new young wife only the previous year, and a son was born to him ('to him' at least in the legal sense) posthumously.

This classbound polygamy deeply affects the sex morality of the women and, indirectly, of the society at large. Respect for chastity and the sanctity of matrimonial ties dominates the traditional moral concepts of Nupe. But this 'double morality' of a social system which legitimizes unrestricted sexual desire of the men in one privileged stratum, but would force similar desires in other strata into the realm of illegitimate and indictable action, is in danger of defeating itself. In Bida it has clearly provided a strong stimulus to extra-marital sex relations in all classes. Moreover, the starved sexuality of the women in the large polygamous households strives to find an outlet.[1] The insecurity of their legal position tends to remove the barriers of conventional matrimonial morality. Thus many of the younger wives or concubines seek satisfaction in illegitimate relationships and even semi-professional prostitution.

Adultery, including adultery in this extreme form of semi-professional prostitution, is extremely widespread among women of every status. Prostitution in the strict sense (practised as a profession and in brothels) does not occur in Bida. But we have heard that the kola-nut vendors on Bida night-market, all married women, are prostitutes at the same time.[2] We shall learn later of the close association between women's trade and prostitution (and the large majority of Bida women are traders of one kind or another). 'Every woman', an informant told me, 'whom you see beautifully dressed in the streets of Bida after dark, is a "bad" woman.' Informants, themselves married men, were all agreed that there were hardly any 'good' women left in Bida. But when I asked them what the husbands were doing about this they said: 'Nothing; what could we do?' Indeed, they can do little but shut their eyes. The obvious alternative, divorce, is impossible in most cases. Poor men cannot afford to divorce their wives, for this would mean forfeiting part of the bride-price and thus their only chance of finding another wife; moreover, the economic dependence of many husbands on their wives (of which we shall hear more in a later chapter) forbids such a course.

[1] In the royal 'harems' homosexual practices—called *madigo* or *lutu* (the Arabic word for homosexuality)—are, in fact, said to occur.

[2] Their 'tariff' is commonly known: it varies between 6*d.* and 1*s.*

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

757 means of a potion. For the inhalation one uses leaf-tips of the oil-
278 palm, hair of a she-goat, and the pulverized genitals of a he-goat, all burned together in a pot; the potion is made of the sap of a certain 'male' shrub (that is, the fruitless variety, called *darabagi*, 'male *dara*'), the charred bark of another, mixed with natron. The patient, having been treated in this fashion, is said to calm down and eventually to recover, though the cure can never be certain. For violent and dangerous attacks there is no agreed cure. The barber-doctors, in fact, do not treat this form of insanity at all, but other people sometimes know a treatment, though it is always said to be difficult and uncertain. Thus one informant suggested that the patients must be made to fast until they calm down; and another recommended flogging (a treatment apparently widely applied in Yoruba country).[1]

757 A final group of medicines bears on conception and virility.
278 Dried cocoyam, the charred bark of the *savi* tree, and onions,
842 pounded and taken in water, are said to constitute a powerful
832 aphrodisiac. Fertility of women is ensured by a potion, drunk the morning before cohabitation, made of an infusion of leaves of the tamarind tree mixed with natron. Delivery is facilitated by rubbing the womb with three herbs after they have been soaked in water for a night. There are also two 'contraceptive' medicines, one having a temporary effect only, the other believed to cause permanent barrenness. The former consists of two powdered herbs, mixed with bits of grass from a termite mound, and taken with water; the latter, of the charred stalk and leaves of a young cassava plant, mixed with henna root and natron, boiled in water, and drunk. The knowledge, incidentally, of the permanent 'contraceptive' is claimed to be purely platonic; the Bida practitioner at least has no chance of applying it in practice, not because he is reluctant to do so or because the Bida women avoid these shameful practices, but because they would not risk their reputation by thus openly consulting a 'doctor' in the town. Instead, my informants assured me, they go to 'medicine-men' in the villages, where they are unknown and their secret will be safe. A secret in fact it is; and here we meet with a first, though fairly mild, instance of reprehensible medicines, employed for immoral ends.

757 This list is far from complete, omitting, especially, the many
759 variants of the same kind of cure.[2] The barber-doctors do not believe in specifics in the strict sense of the word; rather, there are several treatments for each ailment, and different practitioners

[1] The informant in question came, in fact, from Shari, a village on the border of Nupe and Yoruba.

[2] I recorded altogether thirty-four remedies known to barber-doctors, which number is probably fairly exhaustive.

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

The dance frequently rises to feverish excitement, when the youths will suddenly resume using their whips, violently and against anyone. The flogging now has a purpose: when directed against male adolescents it is thought to promote growth and maturity; when directed against women, fertility. But there are also phases of calm as well as humorous episodes, acclaimed by general laughter. One episode, in particular, may be mentioned: now and again, the young men will imitate, with comic exaggeration, a typical women's dance or caricature the walk and gestures of women.

I will not describe the dance further: it fills the rest of the *gunnu* festivities, being interrupted only for a brief night's rest, and ends when all the beer is exhausted and everyone too tired to carry on. I will only note these important and partly unique features. Some time during the dance the young men form themselves into a procession led by the *Ndazo* and march and dance through the village, still singing the *gunnu* songs, to give the 'salute' in front of the houses of high-ranking elders. On the way they also visit the childless women of the village; for these are strictly forbidden to watch the *gunnu* dance and must hide in their huts until the ceremonial is over. These women may be unhappily barren; or they may be suspected of avoiding childbearing and family duties so that they might lead the immoral life of female traders and prostitutes (which, in Nupe, means one and the same thing). In either case the *Ndazo* will enter their house and encourage or admonish them, as the case may be; the woman, kneeling before him, will receive two lashes with the *gunnu* whip, administered by one of the young men, which is both a punishment and a promise of fertility. Women who have no taste for either will have to leave the village or hide in some other house during the critical period, as indeed quite a few are doing.

Again, few other Nupe rituals include a mixed dance of the sexes; in the *gunnu*, this is not only permitted but considered a relevant part of the celebration, as is the whole excited and abandoned tone of the dance. Always, when describing the *gunnu*, the Nupe will use some such phrase—'we make merry, we drink, we dance, men and women together without order, until we talk without sense'. This excitement is in no small measure sexual; not only is the attention of the young men constantly drawn to the other sex (even by the fact that they wear an item of women's dress), but the week preceding the *gunnu* and the whole period of the celebration are also marked by a severe prohibition of all sexual intercourse, lest death visit the community. Only when the dance is ended and everyone has bathed, the men in a nearby stream, the women at home, is the rule of chastity lifted; the same night men and women will again sleep together, matrimonially or promiscuously—no one cares.

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

risk of divorce or even of their husbands' serious anger. The ritual alone seriously and publicly brands immorality or subjects barren women to a 'cure' which is indistinguishable from punishment.

Thirdly, the hectic mood of the *gunnu* dance is a model 'in reverse'. For this kind of abandoned behaviour is never permitted or thought of in ordinary life, and any open reference to sex is severely shunned by the rather prudish Nupe. Sex and privacy go together; and no ordinary dance permits a mingling of the sexes. Indeed, in all ordinary dances and in most ceremonial ones the whole mood is one of calm and restraint. Perhaps, then, we may call the *gunnu* (and one or two similar ceremonials) a safety-valve, a licensed compensation for otherwise rigid self-control; certainly, it puts a premium on a mode of behaviour otherwise not only improper but unthinkable.

The final instance, again taken from the *gunnu*, is of a slightly different order. I am referring to the masquerading of the boys as girls. 'Masquerading' is possibly too strong a word, for all that happens is that the boys wear a piece of woman's cloth.[1] But this aspect of the *gunnu* dress is always specifically mentioned, and in the general dance the boys are encouraged to imitate and caricature female steps and mannerisms. Now in 'real' life boys or men are never expected to behave like the opposite sex. From the time when children put on any dress at all (when they are about six or seven), they are dressed differently. As soon as the boys form themselves into the earliest age grade (at the age of eight or nine), the occupations, interests, and codes of conduct of the sexes differ sharply, and this is true also of songs, dances, and pastimes of all kinds. Male homosexuality, which would blur this dividing line, is severely condemned and, in fact, denied to occur. The exceptional behaviour at the *gunnu* thus appears to have a symbolic significance (though it is not stated more explicitly), the temporary change of roles pointing to a more permanent one. The boys who are admitted to the *gunnu* are on the threshold of manhood, the very admission to the ritual being a first token of the new status. Before that they were something else—children, still looked after by their mothers as much as by their fathers, and being with women more often than with men. Later, this ambiguous position will come to an end, which change roughly coincides with admission to the *gunnu*. The symbolic identification with the female sex on that occasion thus emphasizes the transition through concentrating it into something like 'a last time' when boys can be confused with girls. It is not literally a 'last time'; for even before this event boys did not walk about dressed like girls or behaved

[1] In the *gani* ceremonial, to be described later, this 'masquerading' is much more elaborate and definite (see below, p. 218).

2: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1954
FF52 Nupe FF52

852 of a famous barber-doctor. In wealthy households, too, drummers
553 and professional musicians will be engaged to entertain the gather-
[305] ing and a women's dance, executed by the younger female guests, will conclude the festivities. Some of the food left over will be sent to relatives and friends who were unable to come; the father may also make gifts to the blind or the poor, or to the children of the town, if the diviners so advise him.

852 In the pagan ceremonial and in the *suna* of the poor the sumptu-
553 ous feast is replaced by a modest meal of meat-and-gruel offered
619 to friends and relations, without the added attractions of music and dancing. The shaving of the infant's head and the cutting of the tribal marks is the same in either case. We note, then, that the ceremony establishing the individual and kinship identity of the new-born also demonstrates his social identity in a wider sense, that is, the membership of tribe and sub-tribe into which the child is born and whose physical marks he will bear for life.

852 A similar idea, though more ambiguously expressed, would seem
304 to underlie also male circumcision. This custom is universal
[619] throughout Nupe, so that having been circumcised must be considered a mark of tribal membership. Yet circumcision is never quoted when one enumerates the things that 'make a Nupe'; indeed, one knows that other tribes do the same and that circumcision is also typical of Islam. The observance presents several
● [834] other puzzling features. It is called *zũ 'ba*, 'cutting the penis', which open reference to private parts is strikingly uncommon. Nor is the performance of the operation any less realistic and business-
[305] like. It is once more in the hands of the barbers, especially hired and paid sixpence or a shilling for their work, and is accompanied by no ceremonial; the only rule affecting everyday family life is that the women must be out of the house on this occasion. The operation coincides neither with birth nor with puberty, that is, with an obviously important event or phase of life. It is performed at the age of eight to eleven and individually for every family, whenever the father thinks fit. The operation is, incidentally, even more repugnant to watch than the cutting of the tribal marks. The boys are terribly afraid; they have to be held down by the barber and his assistant, and severely feel the pain. Yet this shock experience seems again to serve no purpose; it is certainly not linked with any other experience that might be impressed upon the victims after or in consequence of their ordeal: they are neither segregated from the community nor made to feel that they have now passed a vital crisis and acquired some relevant qualification. Nor yet will the operation ever be referred to again. Through it, the boys have been made like other men of the tribe—that is all; but it is difficult to see why it should take place at this time of